

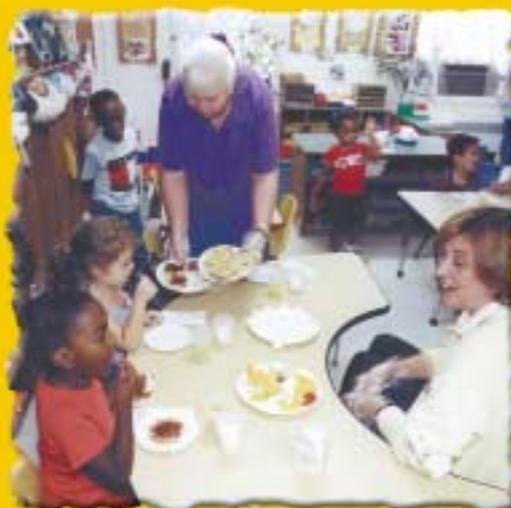
Feeding Children Responsively

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Building a Child-Centered Program

How can you make meals and snacks as “child-friendly” as the rest of the activities at your center? You probably have found lots of ways. Here are some added tips for making mealtime a special experience that children look forward to, learn from, and enjoy.



Making Meals Special...

Meals and snacks offer special opportunities for:

- providing happy, relaxed experiences
- helping children develop positive food attitudes
- building children's confidence and social skills
- communicating with parents

To make the most of these opportunities, try to...

- **Achieve quality service.** Make sure meals are both attractive and tasty.
- **Encourage social interaction.** Teach the children the social aspects of dining as well as how to feed themselves.
- **Make mealtime a happy time.** Provide a transition or quiet time just before meals so that mealtime can be relaxed. Make sure the room is attractive and appealing for young children. Use bright colors and decorations that children like.
- **Avoid making children feel rushed.** Allow children to take their own time to eat. Having to eat in a hurry may spoil the pleasure of eating. In addition, short meal times may encourage poor eating habits. For example, children who are feeling pressured may choose to quickly consume their favorite foods and ignore other nutritious foods in the meal. Also, they may learn to eat too rapidly, a habit that may lead to over-eating and obesity.
- **Make the most of your menus.** Use your menus as a tool to communicate with parents. Send a copy of your menus home with the children. Include your phone number and let parents know they can approach you.
- **Add excitement to your meals.** Expand on activities and cultural events happening in the classroom. Plan activities and/or special meals around holidays or other special events, such as the beginning of spring, National Apple Week, and National Nutrition Month.

Incorporating Nutrition Education Into Your Program

Nutrition education is learning about foods and how they are important to health. It should be part of child care because it helps children in many ways.

How does nutrition education help children?

Nutrition education helps children...

- Form positive attitudes about food and eating.
- Learn to accept a wide variety of foods.
- Establish healthful eating habits early in life.
- Learn to share and socialize at mealtime (in a group eating situation).
- Be ready to continue learning while at child care.



How can you make nutrition education part of *your* child care center? Here are some tips:

1. Get children involved in activities with food and eating.

Children are natural explorers. They are constantly asking questions and discovering the world around them. Children learn through their play and through hands-on activities.

- Think of ways that you can provide learning activities that involve the senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and seeing.
- Allow children to handle food, mix it, prepare it, smell it, and taste it.
- Help them learn to describe foods as they see them. Ask them to talk about a food's color, shape, and texture.



2. Plan activities that match children's abilities and interests.

Children develop rapidly. Activities should take into consideration the children's developmental readiness. This includes both what the children are mentally ready to learn and what they are physically capable of doing.

Younger children are not able to perform the same tasks that older children can. When planning a nutrition education activity, think about the age of the children. Almost any activity can be changed to fit the abilities and the interests of the children being taught.

3. Plan simple activities before harder ones.

Children, like adults, want to be successful in what they do. You can help children be successful by planning activities that are simple and then moving to harder ones.

For example, have the children learn the names of foods. Then as they get older, get them involved in food preparation activities such as measuring.

4. Build on what a child already knows.

Children learn by building on something they already know. When you introduce a new topic about food and eating, connect it to something already familiar to the child.

For example, most children have seen adults put gasoline in their cars. Explain that just as gas makes cars go, food "makes children go." It helps them be able to grow and play. Just as gas is fuel for cars, food is fuel for people.



Ideas for Nutrition Education Activities

Learning about different foods and their importance to health can be fun for children. As the following ideas show, nutrition education activities can...

- be lively and varied
- take place in a variety of settings
- be combined with many other activities

Let's Take a Road Trip!

- **Plan a trip to the local grocer.** Many large grocery chains have tours especially for younger children. Take them to the produce aisle to learn more about unfamiliar fruits and vegetables.
- **Live near a rural area? A trip to a farm can show children where food comes from.** Give them a chance to watch cows being milked, or fruits being harvested. Take them to a farm or an orchard and help them pick their own berries, pumpkins, or apples!
- **Is there a food manufacturing or bottling plant nearby?** Arrange a visit for the children. They will be fascinated by the big machinery. And, especially if they have already visited a farm, they will see a connection between how food is grown and how it gets to the grocery shelf.
- **A bakery is a great place for children to learn how bread is made.** Think about allowing the children to bake their own bread loaves once you get back to the child care center!

Let's Have Fun with Food!

- **Play a guessing game with the children.** Everyone enjoys a mystery. Place different fruits or vegetables in paper bags, and have the children identify the mystery food by feel alone! (Make sure children wash their hands first.)
- **Match pictures of foods and food products.** Show the children pictures of foods (such as milk, corn, and apples). Then give them pictures to help them identify various forms that those foods can take (in this case, for example, cheese and yogurt, corn-bread and cereal, applesauce and apple pie). Be creative!
- **Have a colorful tasting party with new and familiar foods.** Cut up fruits and vegetables that the children might not normally eat (kiwi, star fruit, mango, broccoli or cauliflower, turnips, or mild radishes). Add some more familiar fruits and vegetables, along with some dip. Be sure that the display is colorful!
- **Show what you can do with a single vegetable or fruit and the different forms it can take.** For instance, show children that a carrot can be shredded, sliced, diced, grated, or cut into sticks. Explain that it can be eaten raw or cooked.



It's Learning Time!

- **Have children build their own Food Guide Pyramids.** Using pictures of foods from magazines or newspaper advertisements, have the children create their own Food Guide Pyramids by placing different foods in their proper places.
- **Make a giant Food Guide Pyramid on the floor with string.** Give children pictures of different foods and have them place the foods where they think they should be on the Pyramid.
- **Teach children their colors by using fruits and vegetables.** Eggplant, grapes, oranges, carrots, red and green apples, celery sticks, broccoli, bananas, and summer squash are all great foods to use!
- **Help children learn about different cultures.** Share with them foods that other people from different countries eat. Use a map to find those countries, and share foods they might eat there. For example, locate Central America and talk about and taste pineapple. Do the same with Africa and peanuts, and Japan and rice.
- **Plant miniature herb gardens.** Show the children how simple herbs can make cooked vegetables taste even better.



- **Teach the children how to count using food.** For example, have them count small pieces of fruit (such as pineapple tidbits or grape halves) or grains (such as oat cereal or cooked macaroni). After they count, they can eat! Make sure that children wash hands first, and that clean dishes and handling procedures are used.
- **Set up a “grocery store” in the play area.** Fill the store with a variety of foods—real or plastic examples, empty cartons, or pictures. Include nutritious foods (fruits, veggies, juices, grain products, meats, and dairy products) and foods that are not full of nutrients (i.e., cookies, soda, candy). Let the children “go shopping” and learn how to make wise food choices.
- **Help the children grow potato plants.** Stick toothpicks into white or sweet potatoes, then suspend the potatoes in a cup full of water. Place them in a window, supply them with plenty of water, and watch the potatoes sprout!
- **Include special foods during holiday and ethnic celebrations.** Invite the children to bring in their family’s favorite recipes for that day or season.
- **Use stories to help show children how food can be prepared.** The classic story “Stone Soup” is a great way to show children how foods can be combined to make delicious meals. (You could act out the story, then serve that soup for lunch!)
- **Use foods to help children learn about tastes, textures, and sounds.** (How does this taste—sweet or tart? Is it crunchy, or chewy? How does it sound?)



Chefs in Training!

- **Show children where orange juice comes from.** Give each child a plastic juicer and an orange. Have the children roll the oranges, then cut in half... then let them make their own cup of juice for their snack.
- **Create banana pops!** Give each child half of a banana and a popsicle stick. Let the child peel the banana, insert the stick, then roll the banana in granola cereal. Place the “banana pop” in a styrofoam holder, and place in the freezer for a few hours.
- **Allow the children to help make a fruit salad.** Use their favorite fruits! The fruit salad can be part of one of their meals or part of a snack.
- **Show the children how to make “fruit parfaits.”** Use fresh or canned fruit layered with lowfat yogurt or lowfat cottage cheese.
- **Have fun making a dip.** Finger foods always taste better with a dip. Allow the children to experiment with adding spices or condiments to yogurt or pureed fruit. Supply them with sliced fruits, vegetables and/or bread wedges and crackers, and stand back.
- **Make colorful pizzas!** Children love to make their own lunches—and pizza is a favorite of most. Supply them with half of an English muffin, tomato sauce, cheese, and vegetable toppings. Let them build their own pizzas and watch you place them in the oven.
- **Let the children make their own fruit shakes.** These are especially refreshing on a hot day. Using frozen fruit and lowfat milk, help the children pour the ingredients into a blender. In a few minutes, each child will have a delicious treat. (Don't forget the straws!)

CAUTION: If a food prepared by children is used to meet a meal or snack component, you must ensure that the quantity is sufficient to meet meal pattern requirements and that food safety procedures are followed.